

“Citizens of Where?”

Luke 13:31-35

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+13:31-35)

Dr. David W. Swink

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

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“Burn the Candles, use the nice sheets, wear fancy lingerie. Don’t save it for a special occasion. Today is special!”

Welcome to the International Space Station. You might have heard of the original Mir station being somewhat unsafe. Let me assure you that you are safe and sound here in space. I want to invite you to let the burdens from earth fall off your shoulders. After all, you are physically weightless. Let yourself be emotionally weightless for the time that you are here. You can’t do anything about all that worry back on earth anyway. Let go and enjoy your brief stay with us this morning.

I want to suggest that we begin our tour by looking back at planet earth. People who come out here find themselves becoming a little philosophical. Like the song suggests, from this distance we see the earth in a different way. Notice that there are no national boundaries, no economic ghettos, and no racial neighborhoods. From this distance the politics of earth do not really matter. There really are no red or blue states from this distance.

From space we get to view the earth as God does. What was so terribly important before we began the journey doesn’t seem so vital from this distance. Let me share with you what this distance does for me. Perhaps my reflections will spur your own thinking.

- From this distance we can see God’s Kingdom of Heaven, God’s Beloved Community, God’s whole family, as being ultimately important.
- From this distance we can see more clearly that our mission is to accept our identity as God’s abundantly blessed citizens of God’s Kingdom. And,
- From this distance we are able to make a commitment to use the talents, skills, and gifts that the King provides for us.

You are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven!

As I look down at planet earth I am thrilled to be able to share with you that I am a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. As a follower of Jesus, you are a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Through the gift of God’s grace in and through Jesus Christ, you have citizenship in God’s world. Sure, I do carry a passport that says I am a citizen of the United States of America, but that is secondary. I am a white, semi-educated, relatively prosperous, male who lives in Michigan, votes for the person in every election and cheers for the National Champion Duke basketball team. But, all those adjectives are secondary. First and foremost, more important than anything else, I am a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Since the 1960’s the Church of Jesus Christ has been torn apart by politics. At first, the “main line church” set the political agenda. Being a Christian was defined by whether you were for the integration of the races and against the Viet Nam war. Since, the middle of the 1980’s the “conservative churches” are setting the political agenda. Being a true Christian is defined by their agenda as to whether you support for prayer in public schools and against homosexuals and abortion.

From this distance the politics of religion do not seem as important. Defining a Christian by the popular political agenda of the moment seems a bit shallow. Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in today’s Scripture speak these words of truth. The popular religious leaders warn Jesus that he is getting politically incorrect and dangerously close to being investigated by the Herod’s Internal Revenue Service. Jesus says to them what is vital for us to hear:

“Tell that fox that I’ve no time for him right now. Today and tomorrow I’m busy clearing out the demons and healing the sick: the third day I’m wrapping things up....”

Jesus is focused on what is most important. Belonging to the correct political party was not important. Jesus did not care to placate the dominant political power party or person. For Jesus bringing about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth was his mission. The Kingdom of Heaven was more important even than his family. Earlier in Jesus' ministry his mother and brothers showed up in Capernaum to take him home because people were talking about his being a threat to the established religion. Jesus refused to see them saying:

“My mother and brothers are the ones who hear and do God’s Word. Obedience is thicker than blood.”
(Luke 8:20) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+8:20)

At this point in Jesus ministry he is focused on what is most important. Jesus is establishing God’s Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus tells us that God’s Beloved Community is here on planet earth, NOW! How do you become a citizen of this eternal Kingdom of Heaven? Is everyone included? How can persons get a passport for God’s Kingdom? Years after this Jesus moment in Galilee, the jailer in Philippi after the massive earthquake broke down all the walls of his jail asked the key question to the Apostle Paul and his friend Silas. They gave the universal answer to a person seeking to know Jesus. The Apostle Paul’s answer was good then and it is good for all time and every place:

“Put your entire trust in the Master Jesus. Then you will live as you were meant to live---and everyone in your house included!” (Acts 16:31) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=acts+16:31)

Let us take the political barriers out of the church! Jesus is not ultimately interested in whether you are a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. Jesus is not interested in politics. Jesus IS focused upon bringing about God’s Kingdom, God’s Beloved Community on this earth!

Let us proclaim today that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will be saved. Let us shout aloud with our voices and our lives, anyone who entirely trusts Jesus with their life will receive eternal life. God’s grace: God’s gift of unconditional and unearned acceptance into God’s Kingdom of Heaven is available to every person who speaks with their mouth and affirms with their life that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Master. There is no political, economic, educational, gender, or national walls keeping people out of God’s Kingdom.

Two decades later the Apostle Paul writes of Jesus’ vision of God’s Kingdom of Heaven alive and active on Planet Earth when he writes:

“In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ.”(Galatians 3:38)
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+3:38)

From this distance you can see the vision of our blue, green, planet with God’s eyes. There are no national, economic, gender, political, or social walls in God’s Kingdom. We must respect and honor each follower of Jesus as a citizen of God’s Kingdom of Heaven. Whether we like it or not, as brothers and sisters in God’s Beloved Community we are one with each other. We might disagree on everything, but we are in agreement on the most fundamental fact: when you follow Jesus you carry a passport of God’s Kingdom. And, as you carry your Kingdom passport:

Jesus has a mission for you.

As a citizen in the Kingdom of Heaven, you are a member of a team of people committed to doing God’s work. Jesus rejects the political agenda because Jesus already has an agenda. Jesus’ mission is to cleanse the world of the influence of evil and to heal the sick. This is not a new agenda. Remember Jesus stated his mission in Nazareth and the beginning of His ministry. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus said he was walking on the planet because:

“God’s Spirit is on me; He’s chosen me to preach the message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, “This is God’s year to act!” (Luke 4:18) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+4:18)

Let me see if I can put this in different language so that all of us can connect.

In and through Jesus Christ you are a citizen of God’s Kingdom of Heaven. What I am now talking about is what you do as a citizen.

In and through Jesus Christ you are a member of God’s family. What I am talking about is the chores your Heavenly Father asks you to do to benefit the family.

In and through Jesus Christ you are a part of God’s team. Jesus the coach develops a game plan that will include the participation of every team member in a specific way. You have a vital and important role to play on the team if victory is to be assured!

In and through Jesus Christ you are an integral part of a multi-planetary company. The Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Committee of the company have a long-term strategy. There are important tactical tasks for each employee. You must do your job as best you can if the company is to be successful.

From this distance, as we look at Planet Earth, whether we speak in philosophical, Kingdom, family, athletic, or business language the most important truth to be understood, the bottom line to appreciate, is that you have an important mission to do for the expansion of God's Kingdom of Heaven right here and right now.

- Your mission might be to educate and discipline, love and cherish the little children who are growing to be the next generation of citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Your mission might be to mentor youth so that they grow to be leaders in God's Kingdom.
- Your mission might be to heal the sick, perform surgery on the seriously ill, or care for the dying.
- Your mission might be to tend God's planet earth and keep chemical poisons out of the water and soil.
- Your mission might be to listen and to help persons bring clarity of mind out of the confusion of their lives.
- Your mission might be to build responsible business practices that are both humane and environmentally respectful.
- Your mission might be to visit the elderly in their homes in order to bring comfort and love.
- Your mission might be to encounter the prisoners and offer hope for a better life through Jesus Christ.

I could go on and on with examples. Your Heavenly Coach, Chief Executive Officer needs you to learn your mission and to do it.

Years ago Jesus gave me the mission of building bridges. In Biblical language the word for bridge building is reconciliation. God charges me with the responsibility of building bridges between estranged persons, racial groups, socio-economic disparities, and spiritually diverse peoples.

God is blessing you with a Heavenly Identity and Heavenly talents!

I know that you might feel inadequate. You have listened to the inner voices of the world too long! I know that you might feel unworthy. Again, you have listened to your inner voices discouragement too long. I know you might feel like you don't have enough time. Can you guess where that inner voice comes from?

Allow me to proclaim loud and clear that God is blessing you with a Kingdom Identity as God's beloved child! Accept your core identity today and reject all the negative mind talk that goes on in your head. If God loves you enough that Jesus would die for you, then Christ makes you worthy! Christ makes you adequate! Christ creates in you a positive, can do spirit! You are a beloved, talented citizen of God's Kingdom!

What is your mission? Your mission is to live as though each day were special, because each day in God's Kingdom is special. When you are doing God's mission and celebrating Christ's Heavenly Identity, then you are living God's abundant life right here and right now.

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